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ABSTRACT

Teachers are often placed in teams and expected to work together without support or instruction. This paper presents findings of a study that identified and described the extent to which individual teachers collaborate and the conditions under which collaboration occurs. The study, which focused on three middle schools with a strong commitment to teacher teaming, was part of a larger research study sponsored by the Center for Organization and Restructuring of Schools. Data were gathered from interviews with teachers, administrators, and other key actors; observation of classrooms and meetings; and review of school documents. Teachers who reported success identified three areas in which they felt most supported in their collaborative work--in discussion about students, instruction, and curriculum. Individual knowledge, individual past practice, and the conditions of schooling influenced collaboration. The presence of structural and social conditions are not enough to ensure the creation of professional community. Creating an ongoing communal activity requires a commitment among members based on need; an embracing of a variety of complementary interests; and on the belief that individual success as being necessarily linked to communal success. (Contains 31 references.) (LMI)

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Collaboration Efforts Among Teachers: Implications for School Administrators[1]

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Introduction

Over the last decade the work of teachers has been one of the most salient themes in the school reform literature. The literature has addressed three distinct foci: (1) the need to substantially improve the organizational conditions under which teachers work (Firestone and Bader, 1992; Levine, 1989; Louis, 1990; Newmann and Rutter, 1987); (2) the need to professionalize teaching as a career (Carnegie Forum, 1986; Darling-Hammond and Goodwin, 1993; Firestone and Bader, 1992) and (3) the need to establish schools as communal places of caring and concern for children (Bryk, Lee, and Smith, 1993; Bryk, Lee, and Holland, 1993; Newmann and Rutter, 1987; Strike, 1993). Thus, schools were faced with two key dilemmas--the task of increasing professionalization and the task of increasing community within schools.

Additionally, nationally-based studies and individual authors have expressed the need for teachers to begin a meaningful dialogue around the issues of students, curriculum, instruction, and the school (Carnegie Forum, 1986; Darling-Hammond and Goodwin, 1993; Fullan, 1992; Little, 1990). Studies that specifically address collaborative work by teachers, in group contexts such as teaming, are lacking. Thus, as a motivating focus for this work, the notion of collaboration was chosen, as it represented one possible intersection of the two school improvement literature bases. This study proposed to identify and describe the extent to which individual teachers' collaborate and the conditions under which collaboration occurs. Implications for school administrators are offered.

Analytic Framework

Creating strong professional communities holds several potential advantages for schools. Among the positive outcomes that writers on professional community have suggested are the growth of increased responsibility for performance (including instructional expertise), increased personal commitment to work, the replacement of

bureaucratic, rule-based controls over teacher behavior with values that promoted self-regulation, and the promotion of a climate of inquiry and innovation that lead to greater organizational learning and effectiveness. The outcomes of increased professional community can be categorized under three broad headings: (1) an increased sense of efficacy relating to work that results in increased motivation in the classroom; (2) an increased sense of satisfaction with the personal dignity of work; and (3) greater collective responsibility for student learning. While these are conceptually distinct, they are also related, as will be apparent in the discussion below.

Increased Efficacy: Teachers' sense of affiliation with each other, with the school, and their sense of mutual support and individual responsibility for the effectiveness of instruction is increased by collaborative work with peers (Louis, 1992). Emergent professional communities increase opportunities to improve classroom practice by expanding the number and quality of feedback mechanisms available to teachers. In general, teachers will only seek out and accept serious reviews of their work when there are more open and supportive relationships among staff. Thus, the importance of frequent reactions to performance from peers and supportive school leaders is a consequence of its strong relationship to sense of efficacy among teachers (Louis and Smith, 1992), and sense of efficacy is, in turn, related to collaboration; personal commitment to teaching and students (Louis, 1992).

Satisfaction Emerging From Personal Dignity: One issue that frequently arises in talking about teachers' work is the discouragement that many of them feel when they believe that their best efforts are neither respected nor valued by peers, supervisors, or the public. However, when it is combined with other strategies for improving teachers' work, it appears to contribute to teachers' sense of responsibility for student learning (Lee and Smith, 1996; Louis, Marks and Kruse, 1994). It is hypothesized that this occurs because some strategies for increasing teacher influence validate teachers' perception of their own value as social agents. Newmann (1991), for example, suggests that giving teachers more

individual autonomy, discretion and control in conducting their work will encourage a greater sense of ownership of and responsibility for quality in student learning. Johnson (1990) suggests that teachers obtain the greatest satisfaction from empowerment that focuses on teachers and classrooms; and that involvement in policy-setting that is not directly related to their own work is viewed as a distraction.

Collective Responsibility for Student Learning: Any professional is, by definition, expected to be responsible for the quality of his or her own work. Good teachers, for example, typically view themselves as accountable for their students' learning, even when there are no external systems that would hold them up to some performance standard. This private sense of accountability is, however, an ineffective means of maintaining organizational performance (Mitchell, 1993).

Furthermore, the work suggests that within professional communities it is possible for teachers to collectively set and enforce standards of instruction and learning. Instead of obeying bureaucratic rules, teachers act according to local norms of professional behavior and duty which have been shown to be far stronger social control mechanisms (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1994). This also creates room within the school structure for principled disagreement and discussion on different issues, which can add to a teachers' professional growth. It is within the framework of professional community that the notion of collaboration takes life.

Many feel that in addition to becoming more effective at collective learning, schools must become stronger professional communities if they are to restructure (Louis and Kruse, 1995; Bryk et al; 1993). Professional communities in schools are characterized by five conditions which, including collaboration, emphasize the need for teachers to work together:

Shared norms and values: Members of the school community affirm, through language and action, their common assumptions about children, learning, teaching

and teachers' roles, the importance of interpersonal connectedness, and commitment to the collective good (Bryk, Lee and Holland, 1993).

Reflective dialogue: Reflection promotes teachers' awareness of their practice and its consequences. Commitment to reflection as a communal activity means regular conversation among teachers focusing on the academic, curricular, and instructional concerns of practice within the school, as well as on issues of student development and progress (Osterman, 1990).

De-privatization of practice: Teachers within professional communities are committed to practicing their craft in public ways. They share and trade-off the roles of mentor, advisor or specialist when providing aid to and receiving assistance from peers (Lieberman, Saxl, and Miles, 1988).

Collective focus on student learning: Teachers' professional discussion and action centers on students' opportunity to learn and seeks to enhance student benefit (Darling-Hammond and Goodwin, 1993).

Collaboration: Collaboration, or the exchange of expertise, is fostered by, and is a natural outgrowth of reflective dialogue and deprivatized practice. Collaborative efforts enhance shared understandings and reinforce the mosaic of relationships within the school. (Little, 1990).

Teachers in many schools may be involved in rewarding professional communities consisting of smaller groups of teachers within their school, or relationships with colleagues from other schools (McLaughlin and Talbert, 1993). It has been argued, however, that when schools attempt significant reform, efforts to form *school-wide* professional community and collaboration are critical (Louis and Kruse, 1995).

The Centrality of Collaborative Reflective Practice

Not all school communities have a strong propensity to learn and change; not all collaborative efforts support enhanced professionalism. However, these concepts share a

common focus on the need for sustained conversation about what the organization does and what it knows. Moreover, the two become linked through a third concept of reflective practice. Much work-related teacher discussion is reflection that enhances both professional community and collaborative efforts.

When teachers engage in serious discussion about accepting and acting on the knowledge of one of their peers or how to implement an instructional model, or when they work out adaptations for their own use of the core ideas of popular programs such as the Bay Area Writing Project, they create new interpretations of best practice. In addition, when they jointly consider the findings of action research they have conducted within the school, they begin to generate new knowledge. In all of these cases they are engaged in collaborative efforts, and they are manifesting and perhaps strengthening professional community through reflective practice: the serious examination of their own experiences as teachers.

Teacher actions that focus on student learning may be considered cooperative, collegial or collaborative (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, and Hall, 1987). Cooperation represents a very basic level of social interaction among teachers. In contrast, collegial relationships are characterized by mutual learning and discussion of classroom practice and student performance. The most advanced forms of collegiality evolve further into genuine collaboration, the essence of which is co-development. Faculty may call on each other to discuss the mutual development of skills related to the new accomplishments in practice, or to generate knowledge, ideas, or programs that will help advance their expertise or contribute to school performance. Complex and confusing data, including classroom experience, can create shared understandings, as well as enhancing the community in which the members work. True collaborative efforts, on the other hand, have not only tangible products but also lead to voluntary commitments between teachers that stimulate "richly substantive discourse" (Little, 1990 p. 522).

There are probably few schools where one cannot find a few instances of collaborative bonds between pairs of teachers. However, central to the idea of school-wide professional community is that collaboration is a generalized attribute of the school. Collaboration among many professionals, including across groups, is critical for the development of school-wide professional communities. Role and department boundaries, which often serve as rigid barriers, become more permeable (although these groupings may remain very meaningful sources of professional engagement). This flexibility helps to shape information, routines and the transfer of knowledge between grade levels and departments--an important feature of any organization that is adaptable and open to change (Cohen, 1988). Individual skills and knowledge provide the foundation of the school's capacity, but a school's ability to manage complex cycles of innovation depends on the ingrained habits of learning from colleagues both within and across work groups.

Methods

Sample and Data Collection

This study was conducted as part of a larger research effort sponsored by the Center for Organization and Restructuring Schools. Three middle schools characterized by a strong commitment to teaming were selected from a larger population of middle schools studied. The selection of middle schools for this study cuts across two separate projects--one a national study of 24 K - 12 "restructuring schools" and the second a longitudinal study of three middle schools. Both studies selected a sample of schools from a national search of schools engaged in restructuring projects. The sampling procedures and methods for both studies have been described elsewhere (Louis & Kruse, 1995; Berends & King, 1994; Newmann, in press) and will be briefly summarized here. The data collection and analysis procedures were similar for the two studies, and will be described in more detail.

Both studies called for examining schools that were well along in the process of restructuring, and that serve school populations that are, statistically, most likely to be "at

risk" of performing poorly in school. In both cases, schools included were selected after a national search for appropriate sites. In one study, seven schools, located in three states, were studied for a period of four years (1990-1993). In the second study, 24 schools located all over the U.S. were studied during a single school year (eight each in 1992-1994). The sample of schools in this analysis was limited to the schools where the author was part of the research team.

Three primary data sources were used for the study-- interviews with teachers, administrators and other key actors in the school, classroom and meeting observation, and school documents (Louis and Kruse, 1995; Newmann, in press) The primary difference between the two studies is that in one site, data were collected by a single field worker (the author of this paper) over a three year period, while in the two other schools, data were collected by a team of site workers (including the author of this paper) during two one-week visits in the fall and spring of a single academic year. In all cases data sources were used to gain an understanding of the work experiences of teachers and how those experiences affected the collaboration and dialogue of teachers with one another.

Interviews: The studies used a range of predetermined questions which were informed by the similar theoretical framework developed for the studies. However, following Miles & Huberman (1994) questions were applied flexibly, and changed both over time and were modified to reflect the particular circumstances of the school. The questions served as a guide to a conversation about teachers' work in the school rather than as a formal orally administered survey. Most interviews occurred in classrooms or school offices, and lasted, on average 50 minutes. In many cases, interviews occurred after the teacher had been observed teaching a class.

Classroom and meeting observation: Classroom observations served different purposes depending upon the study site. For the purposes of this analysis of teacher teaming, classroom observation served the primary function of providing a "conversation starter." Meeting observations included three different groups: (1) steering committee,

focus team, or school governance meetings; (2) team planning meetings; and (3) faculty or whole school meetings. At each meeting extensive field notes were taken, artifacts collected and informal interviews conducted after the meeting adjourned. Team meetings were audio-taped and transcribed where appropriate.

Document collection: Finally, a large collection of artifacts was collected at each research site. Although these varied from school to school, they provided a paper trail that, after careful study, produced a fruitful domain for the generation of new informal and formal interview questions. Included were documents of school philosophy and curriculum rationale, official meeting minutes, in-house memos, and newspaper editorials and reports about the schools.

Data Analysis

During data collection there were several different currents of activity. These processes took place at both the levels of the individual researcher and the larger group of researchers. At the level of an individual researcher, the process of data reduction occurred continuously, both through the development of interview and field notes, and comprehensive case studies written to a common outline that became primary data sources (Merriam, 1990; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1984). A second form of preliminary data analysis involved staff meetings, in which discussion focused on data collection activities and emerging conceptual frames and themes. The meetings served as forums of collegial challenge where critical review and questioning of interpretation of both data and theory were possible. Finally, a comparative study of the cases was undertaken.

Middle Schools As a Setting for Collaboration

The middle school movement was founded on the belief that small stable communities of learning, a core of cooperative academic programs, and teachers who are expert in the early adolescence are necessary prerequisites to improving the academic and

social success of 10 to 15 year old students (Carnegie Council, 1989). In fact, few other large-scale "bottom-up" reform projects have had the impact of the middle school movement, and few middle school teachers would suggest the transformation has been anything but positive for their teaching. One frequently mentioned benefit to teachers was the addition of collaborative interdisciplinary teaching teams.

As defined by Doda & Lounsbury (1981) teaching teams consist of "teachers from varying disciplines [who] are organized into core groups to share [the] instruction of a given community of learners." It was the collaborative, interdisciplinary nature of teaming that attracted the Carnegie Council (1989) to the idea. They called for the development of teacher teams to provide,

> [A]n environment conducive to learning by reducing the stress of anonymity and isolation on students...Teaming creates the kind of learning environment that encourages students to grapple with ideas that may span several disciplines, and to create situations to problems that reflect understanding, not memorization. (p. 38-40).

Although the Carnegie Council's initial focus was on the educative possibilities teams offered students, the benefits to teachers were not lost. The council noted that,

> Interdisciplinary teams also provide a much-needed support group for teachers, eliminating the isolation teachers can experience in departmentalized settings. School-wide morale among teachers often increases significantly with team teaching. (p. 40)

Thus, if true collaboration were to be found in schools, middle schools presented an ideal opportunity for teachers to develop these skills.

The Three Schools

Oak Leaf Middle School:: Oak Leaf Middle School is rural middle school of 400 students (fifth through eighth grade). The faculty of 26 full-time teachers is divided into four teaching teams of four academic subject area teachers and support-based elective staff. The student population includes the children of the farming communities surrounding the county seat, the children of a local high-tech company and children from a nearby Native

American reservation. The student population is 84% white, 13% Native American and 3% other minority.

Shining Rock Middle School:: Shining Rock (grades sixth through eighth) is nestled in a concrete valley between a major airport and an industrial plant on two sides, and a hill, a highway and a shopping mall on the others. The school district is small--1,800 students, with three elementary schools, one middle school and one high school--but it has many of the problems of a big city which borders it. The faculty of 30 full-time teachers is divided into three teaching teams of four to six members and support-based elective staff, including two special education teachers and eight specialist teachers. The student population is predominantly working and lower class--36% of the students are eligible for lunch subsidies. The school is ethnically mixed, approximately 10% African American, 8% Asian, 5% Native American and 5% Hispanic.

Copan Middle School:: Copan Middle School is one of three sixth through eight grade schools serving a rapidly growing suburban area outside of a major metropolis. In 1990 the school was awarded the distinction of "National School of Excellence." Large banners proclaim this distinction and all of the school's promotional materials carry the phrase. The school, with almost 2,000 students, has suffered from overcrowding since the day it opened. The full-time faculty of 97 teachers is divided into twelve teams of four members and four teams of five members (these teams include the mainstreamed special education students) with the remainder of the faculty teaching either elective courses or service as curriculum specialists. The student population varies from wealthy to lower income, and is ethnically mixed: approximately 84% non-Hispanic Caucasian, 7.4% Hispanic, 6.5% African-American, and 2.4% Asian. Fifteen percent received free or reduced lunch.

Collaboration in Practice

Restructuring, by definition, has focused on the structure of the school and the lives of those who work there. The literature is deep both in its affirmation of the struggles of teachers' lives and its subsequent prescription of structural changes necessary to ameliorate those struggles. Embedded in this literature is the call for teachers to become more collaborative about their practice. However, the pragmatic realities of collaborative work are many. Collaboration is complex work. It requires that teachers find a "common ground" providing a central idea for discussion concerning teaching and learning. In its simplest form collaboration provides personal support in a time of changing expectations of teachers' work. In more complex forms collaboration allows teachers to maximize their efforts and create more challenging classrooms for students.

However, teachers' collaborative actions are often part of an undefined process in which teachers have been placed in teams and expected to work together without support or instruction concerning the skills needed to make such assignments productive. Even in these difficult situations many teachers are able to productively move forward in collaborative work. Teachers who report success discuss three areas in which they feel most supported in their collaborative work: discussion about students, instruction, and curriculum.

Students

Teachers' collaborative reflection upon students generally focuses on shared concerns about students or student problems. Specifically, the focus is on addressing students' inability to learn for reasons of poverty, disability or personal problems. Making contact, reaching out, and positively affecting a student's life and school experience are prevalent themes in teachers' collaborative reflections on and about students. With a primary goal of communicating positive school behaviors and appropriate learning skills,

teachers struggle to create highly specific forms of interaction (e.g., home-base or advisory activities, and drop-out prevention teams) in order to provide a bank of common experience from which students can draw appropriate behavioral and academic responses. Shining Rock teachers give high marks to cooperative student-focused programs:

> "We're not just teachers: we're counselors, parents, you name it. You've got to do everything. If you don't show love and compassion to these kids--it's not just what's up on the board--there's a lot more to it than that. One thing that's really strong about our teams is working with individual students. The ones who we work on are the ones with a lot of problems. . . . we call the parents, we have a conference, we try to think about homework. . . .What really helps the kid is that we get a general picture of how the kid really is." (Shining Rock--TURN)

Copan teachers speak in glowing terms about their strong student focus:

> "Our course work [in dropout prevention] is on self-esteem, study skills, peer relations, conflict management and re-engaging with the world. Many of these kids are in danger of dropping out on life as well as dropping out of school so we attempt to reach the whole child. Without the team focus I couldn't do it all myself. Here I feel I'm not in it alone." (Copan--FRAZ)

Similarly, Oak Leaf teachers feel their multi-graded advisory class serves to meet student needs by creating a lasting four-year relationship between 15 students and one teacher.

> "The lasting relationship you form with kids in advisory is very positive. I enjoy working with the variety of kids at different ages. It's very positive to see them grow and mature. They gain skills as the years go by. It's wonderful when a seventh or eighth grader, who had their own problems with turning work in or something, takes a fifth grader aside and helps them. Kids become teachers in advisory." (Oak Leaf--AI53)

However, even successful efforts such as advisory or home-base activities provide limited opportunities for teachers to collaboratively consider their actions. The primary focus of teachers' comments about students concerns the teachers' ability to appropriately assign accountability. Specifically, teachers are most concerned about creating structures that hold students close enough to nurture and provide necessary guidance, but not so close as to create unnecessary dependence on the teacher. In short, teachers ponder the question of how to create students who are accountable for their own actions while still providing a situation that supports students as they learn and perfect the necessary social, behavioral, and academic skills for future success in school. A Shining Rock teachers sums it up best:

> "It's about teaching kids to be able to function on their own. To be able to get their own work in on time, not lose their papers, learn how to study even if it's noisy at home--after all, I'm not going to be there all the time. So I structure my class on teaching skills they can apply other places and other times. I stress thinking before acting and consideration of others. But I never let them forget it's their life and their responsibility to learn the material and pay attention to the teacher." (Shining Rock--PRIN)

Thus, even though teachers do credit the collaborative efforts they engage in together with providing a needed structure to address the issues of student learning and personal growth, they still feel that there are not *enough* opportunities to "deepen our understanding of what works." However, they are quick to add that the collective work provides a supportive structure for them as they attempt to address the challenges of a contemporary student population.

Instruction

> "For me, teaching, instruction, is something I value. I do it well. I'm proud of that. I'm able to excite kids about their learning, have them get interested in ideas that they didn't know before, create interesting activities, [and] usually they learn from it. I think my ability to construct a good lesson, you know, from beginning to end--set to closure--is perhaps my greatest skill as a teacher." (Oak Leaf--AI53)

The words of this middle school teacher are not unique. They suggest two important pieces of information concerning how teachers view their instruction. First, teachers often measure their sense of success in the classroom by student response and impressions. Second, teachers often consider instruction in terms of unit or lesson construction. Their collective action, as it relates to instruction, is most often centered around issues of presentation of material, student activity, and student involvement.

Such practice suggests that even in these restructured classrooms, supported by collaborative team planning and discussion, the prevailing orientation to classroom practice is still teacher-centered. This Copan teacher is not unique when she says:

> "I try to create lessons that involve students in important ideas. I spend a lot of my time and the team discussion time in the creation of new tasks, assignments that kids will like and learn from. I mean, it is my responsibility to get the basic history stuff. So I have to make it as fun as possible--kids learn better when they're involved." (Copan--MAGN)

She followed that thought with a list of specific tasks she felt contributed to good instruction.

> "I'm in charge of a lot here. I choose the topic, how we study it, what assignments kids do, how they are assessed, [and] how much time we spend on something. All those things matter when it comes to running a good class. And control, if your class is out of control--well, then nothing gets accomplished. It's important things run smoothly. So I spend a lot of time planning each lesson and unit." (Copan--MAGN)

These words suggest a particular orientation to practice not dissimilar from many teachers. Her orientation holds that order and management are important issues for teachers to consider. This is apparent in her tightly controlled and regulated classroom. Even student creativity, an espoused goal for the team this teacher belongs to takes place under her watchful supervision. For this teacher, this is a reflection of her training in a direct instruction model. However, she feels "unable to really know if kids have learned unless I control what goes on." (Copan--MAGN)

Concern with balancing instructional innovation with teacher accountability is one the teachers in this study spoke of often. This can be considered as a tension between traditional forms of direct teaching, viewed as predictable and reliable, and newer more student-involved forms of learning. The crux of the issue lies in a basic orientation toward the teaching-learning act--embedded in the question, "Who controls the classroom?"

This issue can perplex even veteran teachers. A 15 year senior teacher comments on the tension between traditional forms of instruction and the newer, more constructivist models:

> "I used to know how to teach. I planned the lesson and the kids did it. Now it's more confusing. I want to get them more air time. I know I talk too much. But it's the only way I know they're getting the material. If I hold a Socratic discussion, for example, it seems like kids are too free-flowing. Even if we do prepared notes before the discussion they get off task. Like a few weeks ago I wanted to try this idea [the Socratic discussion] so I posed the question--Was Rodney King given justice? I thought it was pretty good, and they were prepared, had note cards, really had researched the issues. But when we had the discussion they didn't stick to the facts, it kind of degenerated into an opinion session. The kids liked it. I didn't want to interrupt but I also really didn't feel like what they were doing was really academic. I don't know what to think anymore." (Copan--KAIS)

The teachers in this study suggested they make choices about what to teach and how they will teach it based on traditional notions of classroom behaviors even when they are using newer alternative forms of teaching. A key difference between the teachers who felt successful in using the newer forms of classroom practice and those who did not may be found in the distinction one Oak Leaf teacher draws between viewing alternative approaches to learning as activities versus viewing them as systematic approaches to learning.

> "I used to like think I'll throw a cooperative group in here because the kids haven't worked together in a while. Or I'd choose a computer lesson or something because we hadn't done that recently either. But now I think--this is important because I've only just gotten this--these activities have a purpose. I chose them not because they provide variety but because they teach the concept better than another method. Once I got this my planning became much better, more focused, and the kids became more involved." (Oak Leaf--AI72)

Her thoughts are echoed by a Shining Rock teacher:

> "Before, I never focused my lessons around thinking skills. I was always trying to put content first. Now, it's mostly like, it's evaluating that is my major focus, and content works its way into it. It's not just infusing evaluating. I never used cooperative teams before I came here. I see so many benefits to using kids in teams most students respond well. I see them operating independently, I see them thinking *much like we do in team planning*." (Shining Rock--MAND, Emphasis added.)

Choosing activities appropriate for learning particular ideas instead of choosing activities because they are trendy or the current focus of an inservice appears still to be a rare phenomenon. Examples of purposeful use of innovative forms of instruction were difficult to locate in this data base. More often, the choice of a particular form of instructive activity was justified by student preference:

> "Kids like this kind of group work." (Copan--FLY)
>
> "I try to use a lot of discussion because kids like it." (Shining Rock--TURN)
>
> "Kids get more motivated to do new things if I let them work together." (Oak Leaf--AI61)

Certainly, student engagement with a learning task is, in some part, a function of interest. However, inherent in the previous quotes is a focus on the entertainment value of particular forms of teaching rather than the instructional value the task provides.

Teachers' collaboration in regard to their instructional work primarily focuses on the process of choosing appropriate activities--traditional or new--for students to fill instructional objectives. Moreover, the tensions are further heightened by misconceptions about the purposes of more innovative student-centered instruction. While it is promising that two of the teams studied were able to draw a distinction between activities as an end in themselves and activities structured for specific learning objectives, it is troubling that even within highly collaborative settings many teachers are not able to critically reflect on the reasons they choose particular activities. Perhaps this is embedded in the fact that when teachers consider instruction as part of their common discussion and collaborative they rely on issues they feel confident in addressing--primarily student interest and lesson and unit planning in relation to existing content objectives. Perhaps it is also related to an endemic dilemma of school restructuring, time.

> "Even though we team and we all like it, we don't ever really get to discussing anything like I thought we were to discuss. When we got the team planning inservice we were encouraged to really work on interdisciplinary units. You know, the 'less is more' thing. But all we seem to have time to do is to parse out the parts of the lessons and units. With more time I think we could do better." (Oak Leaf--C162)

Curriculum

Teachers' collaborative reflective practice concerning curriculum is tightly linked with practice regarding instruction and students. Teachers credit the middle school movement with creating an impetus for curricular change, particularly around issues of integrated curriculum. In the words of an Oak Leaf English teacher,

> "Since we became a middle school we've created more curricular change than in the previous decade. We now plan units with attention to all subjects--student interests, how things go together, how we can capitalize on each other's strengths." (Oak Leaf--AI83)

Traditionally, the creation of curriculum was a process that occurred outside the classroom. Packaged "teacher-proof" products tended to dismiss the teacher as an active participant in the curricular process. In many ways, the teacher and student were instruments of the curriculum rather than a participant in its creation or in its use in the

classroom. This view of curriculum has proven inadequate to deal with the complexity of restructured classrooms today. Teachers are now creating curricula based on student themes, trade books and essential questions. The creation of these units is affected by individual teachers' subject matter knowledge and their intent to "make clear an understanding of the world through subject matter ideas."

Such dual foci often create difficulty for teachers as they strive to balance teaching direct knowledge of an academic discipline with helping students clarify their experiences, feelings and values about particular academic issues. This pressure is voiced by an Oak Leaf teacher as he struggles with feeling "pulled in the opposite directions" of basic skills and evaluative higher order tasks:

> "I try to balance what I do. The team is incredible in helping. My tendency is to stress content over student's opinions about the material. But my teammates always remind me of the importance of holding students accountable for integrating the material with their own ideas. But I feel pulled in opposite directions by two really important objectives. I wish someone could tell me which master to serve--content or student ideas?" (Oak Leaf--AIM1)

Another Oak Leaf teacher strives to maintain a balance between the two poles, and her struggles best exemplify the tension between the twin foci:

> "I'm so torn. I try to include some of each, the facts and the student's creative work. I'm better at designing the creative tasks. That is because the curriculum is so scattered in terms of content. But it's also what I like to do. I love English but I have a hard time choosing writing skills over... literature objectives. Kids read if they can relate to the material so I work hard at drawing those connections. But I hate to leave behind the grammar--it's important too." (Oak Leaf--AI81)

In part, the Shining Rock teachers' struggle with similar issues as they collaboratively designed an interdisciplinary rain forest curriculum. Though the project started off well, addressing both student-focused materials and content areas learning, in the end, an important piece of assessment, the content evaluation--remained unaddressed; much to the concern of this teacher.

> "Last year [the team] brainstormed and went through the process of creating [the rain forest unit]. It's a truly integrated unit. . .we brainstormed activities, essential learning, who should do what, and then we pulled out materials. We had [to work closely with] the science [teachers] so that we could figure out what could you put aside to do this instead. . . [We are still working on] assessment. Probably what we haven't done with the assessment yet is the criteria--defining them well enough.

> True performance-based assessments are there, but that piece needs to be polished." (Shining Rock--TURN)

These words also describe the process many of these collaborative teams use to plan new curriculum. The development of new curricula in the restructured schools (social studies at Copan; reading and art units at Oak Leaf; and the rain forest unit at Shining Rock) were all supported by the collaborative planning process including student needs, organizing teaching and learning materials, and evaluation issues.

> "When we plan curriculum we start by asking what do we want students to know and do? Also, what are they capable of doing? It's a basic question. We usually list these ideas on butcher paper and hang it in the team planning room. It stays there for a while so we can consider the pieces. Sometimes we add things. Then we begin to search for the materials we have to support those goals--a novel, a video, something. We then have a serious meeting to discuss holes--usually, what do we still need to find or invent. The fun stuff begins then. We get creative--crazy. Then we plan an assessment task. These three pieces are necessary to have in place to take the unit to the governance council for approval. It's an exhausting process but really rewarding, especially when one of those inventive things turn out to be students' favorites." (Oak Leaf--AI72)

Such collaborative curriculum planning reflects the best efforts of jointly created teachers' work--and provides a model for other school-wide efforts.

Influences on Collaboration

Much work has been written concerning the structural influences (such as time, physical space, and interdependent teaching roles) on the ability of teachers to collaborate effectively (see Hargreaves & Dawe, 1991; Louis and Kruse, 1995; Bryk et al, 1993). Additionally, Deal and Peterson's (1990) work among others suggests the importance of supportive leadership and school culture when creating collaborative roles for teachers within schools. This study supports the importance of structural and human resource conditions in the development of collaborative work among teachers (See Kruse and Louis, in press, for a complete discussion of collaborative teaching teams and school-wide community). However, this work strives to take those ideas further by considering the importance of communal reflection, in specific, reflection focusing more on the intellectual

strengths that teachers bring to the collaborative process and less on the specifics of structural or cultural influences.

The intellectual strengths teachers bring to the communal reflective process are many and this work can only focuses on three common themes--individual knowledge, individual past practice, and the shared conditions under which they work and teach. These influences are set apart from the circumstances of collaborative activity in that rather than answering the question, "On what issues do teachers collaborate?" the identification of influences addresses the question, "On what arenas of influence do teachers draw, in seeking answers for the problems posed by their collective activity?"

This discussion suggests that teachers possess a complex, practically-oriented set of understandings which they use to shape and direct the work of their teaching. These understandings influence the creation of individually held knowledge about teaching that is action- and decision-oriented. By drawing on individually created and held knowledge teachers feel they can *collaboratively* take an active role in shaping their environment and determining the methods and goals of their work.

The role of individual knowledge

> "When I think about my work I look to what the experts say. Costa about thinking skills, Bay Area Writing Project if we'll be writing, NCTM for mathematics. But I also consider my own ideas. What I know my class can do, how they've worked in the past. . . .What our outcomes are for that subject. In a nutshell, I think about what I know about my class and what the experts say before I decide on a final plan." (Oak Leaf--AI52)

Implicit in that teacher's words, and in the words of many other teachers, is an identification of two forms of knowledge. The first is the knowledge teachers refer to as "textbook knowledge"--which includes the formal knowledge found in students' texts and their own inservice and workshop offerings. This is a formal form of theory-based knowledge. The second form of knowledge is referred to by teachers as gut-knowledge or feeling-based knowledge or, as one teacher termed it, "doing what's right" knowledge. (Shining Rock--MAND) This is a kind of practical knowledge, based in the local,

relational, and situated context of a particular school or district setting. Such knowledge can be described as tacit--known by members of the organization yet often undisclosed. It is a socially-conditioned aspect of teachers' knowledge. These Copan and Oak Leaf teachers comment on the use of formal and practical knowledge in their practice:

> "When we considered going to the middle school philosophy, we read the information written by the Council, interviewed the community members, visited other schools doing it. Then we melded the ideas and asked [a local university] to provide courses based on the skills we needed to do it but sensitive to our community's needs. We do this with all our decisions, study the evidence and then give it a [local] spin." (Oak Leaf--AIS2)

> "Everyone knows if you want input into the real decision-making process you talk with the curriculum council--it's not like it's written down, it's just the way we do it around here." (Copan--OBRI)

This category also includes knowledge gained in attempts to solve problems of instruction, curriculum, or student concerns. The methods by which such knowledge is sought include deliberative processes of reflection focused on goals, beliefs, and valued outcomes for students. Teachers at Copan identify areas of problem-solving in which practical knowledge is paired with formal knowledge to create sound instructional opportunities for students:

> "When kids start coming to us with problems, we try to help them solve them themselves. Talk to them, ask them what the issues are. Our focus on conflict management skills gives us a plan to link these issues back to important learning. It's become a practice for our team. We teach the skills as they were taught to us and then let the kids apply them in a manner most useful in the situation." (Copan--PRINC)

As these comments demonstrate, tacit knowledge is not uninformed knowledge. Quite the contrary, it is often informed by formal, theoretical knowledge of subject matter, child development, learning, and social theory. It is knowledge informed by rather than divorced from theory. It is often knowledge teachers create when they work to transform the theoretical to the practical. As explained by the Oak Leaf superintendent, it can lead to a process in which teachers' knowledge is valued and used to inform new ideas:

> "We have an intelligent group of teachers here. They're a really strong group of people who have good educational backgrounds. I don't try to negate that. In fact, a lot of our committee placements are based on personal skills--[Dan] knows math, [Gary], English, [Amy] knows child development and so on--the task is to take all

> that varied information and turn it into shared, useful stuff. But if we use those people with those skills to read the new research and determine if it's good for [Oak Leaf] kids, it forms a solid package. I can go to the community confident that our teachers have made informed choices." (Oak Leaf--AIS3)

When teachers reflect about what to do and why they should do it, they appeal to both forms of knowledge in their attempts to solve their classroom dilemmas. Individually held knowledge paired with individual past practice can then act to inform the efforts of the entire team.

Individual past practice

The practice of teaching draws on a wide range of formal and practical knowledge, which grows as experience increases. Teachers can gain deeper understandings as their firsthand wisdom regarding students' learning styles, interests, needs, strengths, and difficulties expands. The development of teachers' experience manifests itself in an increased repertoire of instructional techniques and classroom management skills. For the study teachers, all new learning is based in past experience and practice. What has occurred is often the measuring rod against which a new experience is judged as an improvement or a disaster.

> "If I try something new and it bombs, really stinks, I always compare it to other good lessons to try to figure out what to do and how to change it. I never toss something out after one try--two bombs and it's gone--but I always try to improve bad lessons by adding back in things that have worked in the past." (Copan--CHAV)

> "We know from past experience that the team approach to addressing student problems is the best." (Shining Rock--TURN)

Reflection on a new experience is compared to past memories of student engagement, achievement, and personal feelings of efficacy. Two teachers reflect on these issues quite clearly:

> "When I think back on lessons what I remember is not so much what I said but if the kids got it, if they liked it and how I felt after the lesson." (Oak Leaf--AI51)

> "When I try to improve my teaching, I compare it to other lessons I've taught. Kids' reactions, my feelings, how the test went. But I'm my own worst critic and I'm never sure if I'm getting it right. It's not the best way to go." (Copan--MAG)

As noted, this reflective measuring tool is imprecise. However, given constantly changing and dynamic forms of classroom interaction, teachers need to be simultaneously aware of many stimuli. It is reasonable that teachers reflect in such comparative forms.

> "So much is always going on. [John's] messing around and I have to go stand by his desk to calm him down. [Mary] doesn't understand the task and I have to re-explain it to her. A group gets off-task or confused. So I try to think about the teaching as separate from all the distractions but it's difficult. I never know--if I taught it better would there be less distractions? But I know it's just not only me--each day the dynamic changes." (Oak Leaf--AI83)

In addition to the dynamic nature of classrooms, the practice of educating students is bounded by the year-long calendar, periods in the school day, and the evaluative semester. Each year, and for some teachers each semester, students rotate in and out, creating enduring uncertainties of practice. While some teachers welcome the chance to begin anew each year, others find this practice disconcerting and incoherent. This is particularly true for elective teachers, such as this home and family life teacher at Copan.

> "I finally get used to the kids after a month and then they switch to another class on the wheel. So I cannot compare their work with their work. I have to rely on how groups of students in the past have done with the task or that method of teaching. It's not the best system for me to gain expertise. I wish I could have the kids for a least a semester. Although, I've heard classroom teachers complain about the same thing and they have their kids for a year!" (Copan--PHAG)

Therefore, some teachers constantly struggle to create coherence in an otherwise segmented worklife. By using past practice as an imprecise measure of current success teachers can compare new practice to old. As teachers work together communally they bring to those discussions the ideas they have formed in preceding years. Collaborative activity is still extremely new for most teachers and they lack a stable set of experiences upon which to draw as they continue to work toward shared, experiential memory. Communal reflective practice is then at once informed by the past and compared to it, as teachers work to create new teaching-learning experiences for themselves and their students. As a Shining Rock teacher stated:

> "I know how I would do it [lesson planning] myself, but I'm still learning about how I do it with these other women. And to a certain extent I have no idea if I could do it with any other group of people. We seem to be able to appreciate how we would do it by ourselves and use that to make a base for our work together. It

works in this team but I don't think it would work like we do it in any other team. I guess it's a lot like learning to teach all over again, only this time with other people." (Shining Rock--CAB)

Conditions of schooling

Teachers, especially those who work in economically and socially depressed areas, see the sometimes inequitable conditions of public schooling as enduring and indisputable. This was particularly acute at Shining Rock, the most urban school in the sample:

> "Most of our students are at-risk because their parents are desperate economically and don't have time to care about their children's education. Many are single parents providing for the family alone--barely surviving economically. We have a large transient population, many of whom are revolving door students, in and out several times during their education. Many parents have given up much of the responsibility for their children to the schools--responsibilities for morals, values, education, sustenance. A large population of our students is deprived and needy--possibly 35-40% of them. I don't see that changing soon." (Shining Rock--MAND)

These issues were not limited to only the urban school. Teachers from Oak Leaf and Copan felt similarly, even though the percent of affected students was not as distressing.

> "There are so many other things that are involved in their lives that make school less important. The parents have so many other things going on. If the parents aren't involved and many of these [lower income] parents cannot be--that's a definite void." (Copan--MITH)

> "It's rocky and tough at times. We want to provide programs but our resources are limited. So we are at least now attempting to involve teachers in one-on-one work with these kids but as the number grows--and it will--I just don't know." (Oak Leaf--AIC1)

These situational influences provide ample "food for thought" for communal action. In fact, this area of concern provided the only example of school-wide collaborative focus in these sample schools. Seemingly, the concerns were ones that spanned the teams, departments, and grade levels in ways that were meaningful for the whole faculty. The primary method for addressing the issues is to create programs and faculty positions to directly meet the needs of a changing population.

> "I think it requires a lot more diligence to meet the needs of all kids, we're trying to create programs to meet those needs--special classes. We're also in the process of hiring a Native American coordinator. That's a growing population for us and we need to meet the cultural needs of students as well." (Oak Leaf--AIP1)

However, when the number of students with severe problems exceeds the number that the established programs can accept, students fall through the cracks. This problem is most severe in the urban school, Shining Rock.

> "During the 1992-93 school year, 200 [Shining Rock] students have been identified as being two or more years behind in reading, mathematics or written language. From the list of 200 we selected 79 students who were at the lowest levels for the learning assistance program. We can handle 79 but not 200!" (Shining Rock--LARS)

Similarly, the larger conditions of schooling--lack of equity, disproportionate funding, accountability--are considered too far removed to be directly affected by individual teacher action and necessarily must be considered a school-wide issue.

> "Disadvantaged kids, district cuts, they conspire to make my live miserable. But I can't do anything about it but try to teach better or differently. It's here that the team effort matters most. I can know that my efforts are supported by others, I'm not trying to hold back the tide all alone." (Oak Leaf--AIG1)

The social situations in which these teachers practice their craft provide pervasive and important influences on their communal thinking and reflection. Teachers appear not separate themselves from the conditions in which they teach; in fact, those circumstances give their work much of its meaning and direction.

> "[The team is important.] If we went back to a six period day without teams, the kids would lose out because during team work we solve a lot of problems. We have personal interviews with the kids, we ask them how they feel, what we can do to help them." (Shining Rock--TURN)

> "The conflict management skills really help the ESE kids to be better friends. It's a social thing that's real important at this age. They say it helps. The program provides that help. We're trying to plan more units like conflict management." (Copan--PRIN)

The political, social, and personal milieu that surrounds a teacher's school and students influences the experiences, expectations, and education a student receives. In an effort to provide greater opportunity and equity, teachers may shape subject matter to take into account the ethnic or economic factors that influence student's expectations, interests, and sense of self. Moreover, teachers cite the conditions of schooling and the schools in which they teach as the area of their practice over which they have the least control. Not

surprisingly, it is also an area of great frustration. The social, political, and economic conditions of schooling exhaust teachers' energies as they work to mitigate these pervasive influences. However, even within these conditions teachers cite the collaboration as an integral part of "getting through" tough times.

> "Without the whole school effort we couldn't get these kids as far as we have. Alone, I just couldn't do it. Together we can focus our effort and be more vigilant. If a kid seems down or in need of something one of us can almost always find the time to help. Also, four or five voices of compliant are much louder than one. Now we use the school focus committee to address these needs. It's so much better because we're not in it alone. You can see change." (Shining Rock--MAND)

Implications for Administrators

Principals nation-wide struggle with the dilemma of creating teaching teams. Many form teams, provide joint planning time and then sit back and wait to see if the teachers take advantage of the opportunity presented them. Some teams, like the ones discussed here, rise to the task; taking on the challenge of collaboratively planning lessons, units and student intervention programs. Other teams never seem to "get off the ground" and flounder in their enterprise. However, there are lessons to be learned from the study of successful collaborative efforts.

This study suggests that the creation of widely held school collaboration is problematic, and that communal reflective dialogue among large portions of the faculty is not likely to appear without strong and steady nurturing. However, as has been written elsewhere (see Louis and Kruse, 1995; Newmann, in press), the presence of structural and social conditions are not enough to ensure the creation of professional community. The data presented here suggest that the presence of structural and social factors are not sufficient to ensure standard and communal reflection among faculty either.

Communal practice is difficult to foster in schools. In part, this is due to their bureaucratic nature. Bureaucracies have not traditionally focused their efforts on the interpersonal relationships present within the organization. Instead, the bureaucratic

organization remains focused on roles, hierarchies of power, and charts of responsibilities for those in particular positions.

In addition to the often rigid, bureaucratic structure of schools, other limitations have been placed on the development of personal professional relationships as well. For nearly two decades, schools have experienced greater and greater limits on both the financial and intellectual resources available to them. The arts, many humanities classes, and other important programs have felt the pinch, as referenda failed and student rosters declined. Teachers have had professional opportunities reduced as competition for scarce resources has grown at the building and district level. The competitive struggle for resources has become a commonplace within the walls of our schools. However, competitive struggle is not the only possible outcome of the changing environment schools face. As evidenced here, the development of communal action is both a desirable and possible outcome as well.

Therefore, three implications for the creation of on-going communal activity are offered. They include: a commitment among members based in need; an embracing of variety of complementary interests; and individual success as necessarily linked to communal success.

For communal efforts to be initially created and long lasting, they must offer readily observed and indisputable benefit(s) to all school members. The relationships which are forged must be relationships in which the members choose to participate due to a shared perception that membership within the school-wide community is preferable to other, more individual options. The commitment of teachers in teams to each other and to the goals and mission of the team is based in a strongly felt individual need for the communal team relationship. The supportive benefits teachers derive from teaming are at least as great as, and in most cases greater than, the benefits teachers derive from individual practice. Thus, teachers engage in communal work for the concrete benefits it offers them

as individuals as well as the benefits the collaborative structure provides to students and their peers.

To increase communal effort those relationships too must be based in a concrete benefit. Such benefits may include, but are not limited to, greater access to knowledge base, expertise, and enhanced, interdependent teaching and authority roles. The data from the school cases support the notion that these are legitimate needs for teachers and, when present within the school setting, teachers seek out their fellow staff members who hold needed knowledge and skills. When teachers come to view other members of the larger school community as allies in their effort to make sense of the teaching and learning problems that occur within the school, they can then begin to draw on the expertise of others in positive and professional ways.

Within a system where extended relationships between staff are considered beneficial, focused reflection on practice may occur more frequently. Reflection within the communal organization may then become a way of thinking about future needs rather than solely a way of resolving current, problematic situations. Reflection may then become an important part of the school culture, as conversation about things that matter to the participants becomes commonplace.

However, if broad, inclusive conversations are to become culturally normative, the community must embrace a variety of complementary interests. This is necessary for two reasons. First, topics must capture the collective imagination and, to do so, must provide avenues for broad participation. Second, the interests must be complementary so that the faculty do not lose their focus on the shared goals and mission of the school organization. Rather than following the model of random and uncoordinated adoption of innovation, schools must embrace a clearly articulated and understood focus and utilize that focus to channel staff development and shared teaching efforts. Within the school, personal identity is then honored and fostered concurrently with the creation and refinement of a focused, shared, and ongoing improvement effort. The school then serves to provide a context

within which personal identity is formed and where awareness about ones' teaching and professional learning follows the currents of communal conversation and contributes to them. By the creation of a variety of complementary interests--cooperative learning, higher order thinking skills, writing across the curriculum--staff may then focus their involvement in ways that contribute to their personal growth as well as to a school-wide improvement effort. Collaboration is fostered as staff work toward shared goals in ways that increase personal as well as communal intentions.

Additionally, collaborative efforts must be based around the generation of useful, salient ideas for classroom practice rather than contrived exercises to fill an evaluative requirement. Administrative efforts to engage teachers in collaborative activity must focus on acknowledging the vast set of understandings teachers already hold about their teaching and offer support to the extension of those ideas. Leaders need to provide attention to individual teacher development within the context of the school community. This may be achieved by creating an environment where instruction is viewed as problematic and an ongoing construction of a teachers skills and abilities rather than a stagnant technology one applies without attention to individual circumstance.

Collaboration must include all members of the faculty and staff. School leaders must structure opportunities for teachers to engage in meaningful dialogue related to issues of interest to the full faculty. The ongoing provision of time for teachers to meet and talk is necessary for teachers to engage in collaborative activity. However, it is not enough to provide time for teams or other similar planning groups. Time must be set aside on an on-going basis for the full faculty to meet and talk. Cross grade or subject meetings are necessary to extend the feelings of community and collaborative activity among the faculty.

Thus, as individuals succeed, the communal group succeeds. Individual success is necessarily linked to communal success. When individuals learn new ways of practice and thinking they can contribute to the group process in ways that are supportive of the shared goals of the school organization. By creating a system in which the growth of one teacher

benefits all teachers and students through extended focus on improved practice and student learning, teachers can learn to utilize their reflective skills for the benefit of communal goals.

Collaboration can allow teachers to begin the process of defining and refining their educational mission and goals. While there is likely no one center that can capture the attention of every member of the school community, teachers can simultaneously consider a variety of closely-linked complementary interests allowing individual members to participate in a diverse ways. The goal of school-wide community becomes the creation of individual reflective habit leading to an ongoing focused reflective conversation. The benefits to the teacher within the system of the school, and to the students the school serves, are many. If teachers can keep alive a reflective conversation that permits the telling of new narratives and visions of a better school, future generations of teachers may inherit a system of schooling in which all members can benefit from the efforts of a truly collaborative venture.

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